

VZCZCXRO2197  
OO RUEHDE RUEHROV RUEHTRO  
DE RUEHDS #2361/01 2061534  
ZNY SSSSS ZZH  
O 251534Z JUL 07  
FM AMEMBASSY ADDIS ABABA  
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 7186  
INFO RUCNIAD/IGAD COLLECTIVE PRIORITY  
RUCNSOM/SOMALIA COLLECTIVE PRIORITY  
RHEHNSC/NSC WASHDC PRIORITY  
RHMFISS/CJTF HOA PRIORITY  
RUEAIIA/CIA WASHINGTON DC PRIORITY  
RUEKDIA/DIA WASHINGTON DC PRIORITY  
RHMFISS/HQ USCENTCOM MACDILL AFB FL PRIORITY  
RUEKJCS/JOINT STAFF WASHINGTON DC PRIORITY

S E C R E T SECTION 01 OF 03 ADDIS ABABA 002361

SIPDIS

SIPDIS

DEPARTMENT FOR AF, AF/E, AND CA/OCS:J.MARKEY  
LONDON, PARIS, ROME FOR AFRICA WATCHER  
CJTF-HOA AND USCENTCOM FOR POLAD

E.O. 12958: DECL: 07/25/2032

TAGS: [PREL](#) [PINS](#) [CASC](#) [EAID](#) [MASS](#) [MOPS](#) [ET](#) [SO](#) [IS](#)

SUBJECT: ETHIOPIA: PRIME MINISTER WEIGHED DOWN BY SOMALI  
AND OGADEN OPERATIONS

REF: A. ADDIS ABABA 2343

[1](#)B. ADDIS ABABA 2265

Classified By: AMBASSADOR DONALD YAMAMOTO. REASON: 1.4 (B) AND (D).

[1](#)1. (S/NF) SUMMARY. Prime Minister Meles, visibly weighed by the past weeks of tough negotiations on the amnesty for 38 high profile opposition leaders jailed since December 2005, and the close oversight of operations in Somalia and the Ogaden, questioned the Ambassador on July 24 over the Ogaden National Liberation Front (ONLF). Meles noted suspicions by the Ethiopian military that USG tolerance of contacts with the ONLF by the U.S. Congress and the New York Times--and past contacts by CJTF-HOA J2X personnel (force protection group)--was undercutting Ethiopian military efforts to suppress the ONLF insurgency problem. The Ambassador strongly asserted, and the Prime Minister concurred, that U.S. sensitive intelligence, information sharing, and close cooperation with the ENDF was recognized by Ethiopia as invaluable to protecting Ethiopia's security. The question reflected clear frustration by the Prime Minister--as confirmed in our daily contacts with the Ethiopian military and intelligence service--that their counterinsurgency operation in the Ogaden is generating negative international press, criticism from the U.S. Congress, and negating positive developments in Ethiopia. Further, the ONLF threat remains a challenge in a region where the ONLF is highly popular.

[1](#)2. (S/NF) Meles confirmed NGO reports that the GOE was arranging: emergency humanitarian food assistance to all eight zones requiring food in Ethiopia's Somali Region (including 5 zones in the Ogaden where military operations are ongoing) primarily through military escort, and also commercial food shipments to many areas except where insurgents were most active. Some press reports of starvation, systematic rape by troops, and massive human rights abuses, were not substantiated by reports from the NGO and UN community, but Meles acknowledged that the Ogaden was on the edge of a humanitarian crisis if food did not get to people in the next few weeks.

[1](#)3. (S/NF) The Ambassador and Prime Minister spoke about the positive step by the government to release 38 opposition leaders and journalists on July 20, and the expected release next week of remaining supporters who signed a petition for release from jail, but frustration with the press focus on

the Ogaden. Other topics included U.S. efforts to support prepositioning of humanitarian supplies, to meet anticipated flood problems in southern Ethiopia as a result of unexpected heavy rains this season. The Prime Minister expressed deep appreciation for U.S. financial support through Section 1206 and ESF funding. Ambassador pressed the Prime Minister on the detention of Ogadenian-Ethiopian- American Abdi Mohammed, an interpreter for CJTF-HOA detained for the past two months while traveling through the Ogaden with two U.S. military personnel. The Prime Minister said he would investigate the case again with the Ethiopian military, which has custody of Abdi in the officers, club in a military camp in eastern Ethiopia. END SUMMARY.

-----  
GREAT HUMAN RIGHTS VICTORY OVERSHADOWED BY THE OGADEN QUAGMIRE  
-----

14. (S/NF) The Ambassador, accompanied by ORA chief, met the Prime Minister July 24 to discuss the Ogaden and review key bilateral issues. The Prime Minister was clearly exhausted by weeks of tough negotiations on the July 20 release of the high profile opposition leaders arrested in December 2005 after a highly praised national election which was followed by violent demonstrations. The Prime Minister expressed his commitment to release the remaining high profile detainees, expected next week. In a separate meeting with the Ethiopian elders who are negotiating the amnesty deal for the detainees, the Prime Minister was severely challenged and criticized by hard-liners within his own party for advocating the amnesty. Complicating the Prime Minister's decision has been the lack of positive press reports and the highlighting by the U.S. and international press--and by some members of

ADDIS ABAB 00002361 002 OF 003

the U.S. Congress--of the looming problems in the Ogaden area of Ethiopia's Somali Region. Ambassador reiterated the Department's praise for the PM's decision and efforts to release the detainees, despite the severe challenges from within his own party, and encouraged the Prime Minister to remain committed to finalizing the release of the remaining detainees.

15. (S/NF) In response to the Ambassador's questions on the looming humanitarian crisis in the Ogaden, the Prime Minister reaffirmed the Government's commitment to the NGO and UN community earlier in the week to guarantee emergency humanitarian food deliveries to all zones in the Ogaden. He added that there will be, for the most part, military escort of food trucks by the Ethiopian National Defense Force (ENDF). (NOTE. UNOCHA representatives told the U.S. Embassy privately in a separate meeting that a one-month ration for about 320,000 people will be delivered. See REF A. END NOTE.) The Ambassador noted that the main means for effective food deliveries was through commercial trucking. Prime Minister Meles replied that there were commercial food deliveries in three zones (outside the Ogaden area), and that commercial deliveries would take place in other areas; however, due to insecurity and insurgency activities, this may be difficult. But this issue was being addressed by the GOE, Meles added.

-----  
QUESTIONING THE U.S. ON THE ONLF  
-----

16. (S/NF) On press reports and rumors of genocide, systematic rape, cantonment camps and mass detentions, the Prime Minister commented that they were false and that many reports were exaggerated. The Prime Minister then raised suspicions by the ENDF that the U.S. tolerance for contacts with the ONLF, considered by the GOE as a terrorist group, was undercutting efforts in the Ogaden. Meles specifically cited his perception that the New York Times featured highly positive reports on ONLF activities and distinctly negative reports on Ethiopia, and cited contacts by members of the

U.S. Congress with ONLF representatives in the U.S. Meles also dredged up contacts by the J2X (force protection group) for CJTF-HOA operations in the Ogaden over two years ago, when the ENDF charged the J2X teams with contacting the ONLF.

¶7. (S/NF) The Ambassador noted that the U.S. administration did not have much influence over the U.S. press and definitely not over the U.S. Congress. As for the J2X, this team was no longer operating in Ethiopia; contacts by J2X with the ONLF were not intentional but only resulted from the course of their activities protecting CJTF-HOA personnel conducting civil affairs operations in the Ogaden. The Ambassador asserted to Meles the strong commitment by the U.S. to the security of Ethiopia. The Prime Minister agreed that the sensitive intelligence and information-sharing with the U.S., close cooperation on counterterrorism, and receipt of equipment and training from the U.S. was invaluable to Ethiopia's security.

¶8. (S/NF) The Prime Minister noted, in a state of frustration, that Israel was trusted by the ENDF because of historical ties, and that Israel, like China, avoided raising sensitive issues with the ENDF, such as human rights. Meles added, however, that the U.S. was Ethiopia's key partner because of the close information-sharing and mutual commitment to fight terrorism.

-----  
BILATERAL ISSUES: ANTICIPATED FLOODING/1206 FUNDING/ARTICLE 98  
-----

¶9. (SBU) Ambassador and Prime Minister reviewed reports of pending flooding in the south and east, due to unexpectedly heavy rains this season (REF B). CJTF-HOA was helping with prepositioning of tents, water purifiers, and some boats in Addis Ababa, to respond immediately once flooding was reported. UNESCO was supporting with boats.

¶10. (S/NF) The Prime Minister specifically conveyed his deep

ADDIS ABAB 00002361 003 OF 003

appreciation for the generous support by the U.S. for assistance to Ethiopia. This included long awaited (over seven years) C-130 and L-100 transport plane spare parts; increased focus on Ethiopia from PEPFAR and education initiatives; and support for Ethiopia in helping to train Transitional Federal Government of Somalia (TFG) officials.

¶11. (S/NF) The Prime Minister noted that Article 98 was final and had been in force since its signing in Washington in ¶2004. According to Meles, under the Ethiopian constitution, while treaties were subject to ratification by Parliament, amendments and agreements--including the U.S.-Ethiopian Article 98 agreement--went into effect automatically once signed.

-----  
AMCIT DETENTION  
-----

¶12. (S/NF) The Ambassador pressed the Prime Minister on the detention of Abdi Mohammed, an American citizen from the Ogaden region who was an interpreter for CJTF-HOA. Mohammed was detained by the ENDF over two months ago in the Ogaden region along with two U.S. soldiers. Under the SOFA agreement, the U.S. soldiers were immediately released, but Abdi, a DOD contractor from Titan company, was detained. While held in an officers' club, not prison, the Ambassador noted that his continued detention posed a serious problem for the U.S. The Prime Minister said he would discuss the issue with the ENDF and let us know how soon the case would be resolved.

¶13. (S/NF) COMMENT. From our meeting, it was clear that Meles was exhausted and deeply frustrated by pressures of the operations in the Ogaden and Somalia. The high cost of

operations in Somalia, and the negative press on operations in the Ogaden despite the good news of the release of detainees, was a source of frustration for Meles. END COMMENT.  
YAMAMOTO